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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify relationships among three components of motivation: (1) teacher-student relations; (2) the role of teachers as care givers; and (3) the importance of homework in regard to student academic performance. Participants were 31 seventh and eighth graders from a predominantly Hispanic, low-income urban school. Student questionnaires and formal observations were assessed, and patterns were observed among them. Findings reveal that students who have support from and confidence in their teachers are able to have confidence in themselves. As a result, providing a caring and supportive environment was found to be a necessary component in achieving student academic success. Findings indicate some relationship between homework and academic achievement; the lower the percentage of homework completed, the lower the test scores. (Contains 5 tables and 14 references.) (SLD)

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Enhancing Student Performance Through Classroom Motivation

By

Alberto Juarez

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify relationships between three components of motivation:1) teacher-student relations, 2) role of teachers as care givers, and 3) the importance of homework in regards to student academic performance. Student questionnaires and formal observations were assessed and patterns were observed among them. Findings revealed that students who have support and confidence from their teachers, they in turn will be able to have confidence in themselves. As a result, providing a caring and supportive environment was found to be a necessary component among students in achieving academic success.

The ability to produce effectiveness, depends upon the confidence of a students capabilities. It is believed that the greater amount of effort and persistence, the higher the outcome of effectiveness will be produced. Ames (1984) and Nicholos and Miller (1994) found that students' self-perception of ability are positively related to achievement and student motivation. Self-perception can be viewed in two categories: the maladaptive, or the "helpless" and the "mastery oriented" (Diener and Dweck 1978). The helpless syndrome is described by the avoidance of difficult tasks and regression of performance. On the other hand, the mastery oriented is defined as seeking out challenges and progression if not, maintenance of performance.

However, knowledge of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies is usually not enough to promote student achievement. Students must also be motivated to use strategies, as well as to organize thoughts and effort (Paris, Lipson, and Wixson, 1983). Interestingly, previous research has suggested that student motivation (whether positive or negative) depends upon the classroom environment: ranging from teacher-student relationships, self-esteem, and the significance of content taught.

The purpose of this study is to answer three components of motivation and its relation to academic achievement: 1) Does self-esteem have a direct relationship with academic achievement? 2) Does self perception about ones own ability have a negative / positive impact on academic achievement? 3) To what extent does the role of the teacher as care giver have an effect on students' academic achievement? And 4) What role does curriculum content play in students' motivation and academic achievement?

Motivation in terms of self-esteem can differ greatly, depending upon the focus of the student. Typically, students fall under two categories of scholastic achievement: 1) Performance goal, and 2) Learning goal (Dweck & Elliot, 1983). Performance goals is identified whereby students are unmotivated, and do the minimum required to pass. Learning goals is described whereby students crave the quest for knowledge. As a result, two patterns of behavior are generated: 1) helpless, and 2) mastery-oriented.

Inevitably, the helpless pattern is a condition not desired. However, students when faced with tasks that require much involvement, escape responsibility and raise barriers. Helpless students become limited and frustrated in regards to accomplishments. As a result, helpless students begin to develop negative demeanors about their self-esteem. Helpless students begin to blame their helpless behavior as a result of low academic capabilities. Furthermore, students begin to avoid tasks and make up excuses such as boredom, and anxiety over their performance. Helpless students view trying as a waste of time, and question the importance of the subject matter. Students who display this behavior begin to worsen (Dweck, C.S. & Leggett, E.L. 1988).

Mastery-oriented students are described as having the desire to learn. Their motivation and self-esteem level is rather high. Mastery-oriented students believe that success is achieved in small increments. No matter how small or great their success is, their motivational level rises. Mastery-oriented students view success through effort. Rather than viewing failures as such, students in this category view failures as a challenge and are more so determined to do better. The level of optimism for mastery-oriented students is rather high. It is important to note however, that not all of the

mastery-oriented students achieve passing success. Nonetheless, their determination in obtaining success becomes greater.

Previous studies have indicated that teacher / student relationships can uplift student performance. According to Noddings (1992), teachers are not fully able to meet the daily objectives without providing students with a caring and supportive environment. Therefore, caring might be a critical component to student motivation and academic achievement. Wentzel (1996), suggests that when perceived support from parents, teachers, and peers is taken into account, the support from that of teachers has the ost direct link to student's interest in school. In Cohen's (1985) study about perceived support from teachers, research indicated that teachers who demonstrated supportive roles, lessened the negative effects of stress. Students who view this response of caring as supportive will in turn be motivated to learn and try their best. Positive classroom environments have been linked to an increase in student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Research has suggested that caring teacher student / teacher motivation relationships instill values, beliefs, and improved motivation.

Unfortunately, the role of teachers as care givers varies from the high-achievers to that of the low achieving students. Students who take on the role of the "helpless student," often receive less to almost no support from teachers as compared to the "mastery-oriented" students. When the main focus is geared towards the low-achievers, they perceive this act of "kindness" as forced upon (not natural), hostile, and as not being liked.

Attitudes about homework also plays a vital role in determining student motivation. Research suggests that students with a motivation orientation which involves goals of mastery, learning, and the belief of the tasks importance, will engage in more meta-cognitive activity, more cognitive strategy use, and more effective effort management (Ames 1988). If students are required to spend too much time on academic material, they are bound to grow bored with it, and achievement will decline.

Cooper (1989) conducted a meta-analysis research on the effects of homework. In the first study, students who were given homework were compared to students who did not receive homework. Studies revealed that students who were engaged in homework activities outperformed classmates who were not engaged in homework by seventy-five percent. In Cooper's second study (1998), the amount of time spent on homework was related to achievement level. Results indicated that eighty-six percent of students who spent more time on homework, obtained higher achievement scores than those who spent less time.

However, an important factor to note is the relevance and importance of the task being done. Studies indicate that it is necessary to keep students involved by increasing the significance or interest level of the curriculum being offered (Cooper, H., & Lindsay, J.J., & Greathouse, S. 1997). If students believe in the importance of the task, they will make an effort in "getting the job done."

Method

Participants

Thirty one seventh and eighth graders (grade 7, n= 8; grade 8, n = 23) from a split seventh and eighth grade class were selected from my school. A convenience sample which consisted of predominantly Hispanic, low-income, inner city Chicago Public School students. Forty-five percent of the students were female and forty-six percent were boys. Ninety-seven percent where Hispanic, and three percent where White. The mean age of the students was thirteen years and four months. The sample included students from a wide range of achievement levels.

Procedures

All students completed a self-report Student Motivation Questionnaire, designed to assess self-esteem. The questionnaire was read aloud to control for reading differences among the students. The questionnaire was administered by a teacher who had no direct contact with the students in a given day.

Students were randomly separated into two groups (Group a and Group B). Students in Group A. received caring and nurturing treatments such as: a pat on the shoulder, feedback on tests and quizzes, stickers for good effort, and encouraging comments in class. However, students in Group B did not receive any comments or signs of nurturance form the teacher. Later in the term, both groups of students responded to a teacher effectiveness questionnaire entitled; Student's Perception of Teachers as Care Givers. The questionnaire was read aloud and administered by a teacher within the building who had no direct contact with the students so as to avoid any contamination.

Students were categorized into five groups based on the performance of homework completion: 1).100%, 2) 75%, 3) 50%, 4) 25%, and 5) 0%. In addition, homework and test data were collected over a one month period to determine any relation between the two.

Responses to Teachers as Effective Caregivers were analyzed with the performance of homework completion to determine any relation between the two.

Measures

Students responded to a self-report questionnaire that included fifteen items on motivation. Students were instructed to respond to the items on a yes or no scale. The inquiry included items such as: "I do not like to set goals for my work," "If I cannot succeed at a new school task, I give up," "I see no benefits of doing homework."

In addition, students filled out a response questionnaire about their teachers modeling democratic interactions, expectations, nurturance, and rule setting. Students were asked to respond to the questionnaire about their teachers in general. The questionnaire was entitled: Students Perception of Teachers as Care Givers. Lastly, tests and homework data were gathered and obtained from the first and half of the second quarter (fifteen week period).

Results

The Self-Report Student Motivation Questionnaire which included fifteen items, was responded on a yes or no scale. The percentages of the answers given, as well as the Chi-Square, and Critical Values of Chi-Square were calculated. Full descriptions and examples of responses representing each category are shown in Table 1.

Question	Yes	No	(A)	(B)	(C)
1. I feel terrible when I make a mistake in school	67.70%	32.20%	48.8	3.841	0.05
2. If I do poorly in my school work, I try not to let anyone know	32.30%	67.70%	48.8	5.991	0.05
3. A low mark in my school work makes me feel very sad	51.60%	48.40%	47.6	7.815	0.05
4. When I start something new, I think that I might fail	45.20%	54.80%	47.7	9.488	0.05
5. I get very discouraged if I make errors on a task	54.80%	45.20%	47.7	18.307	0.05
6. I like to try difficult assignments even if I get them wrong	58.10%	41.90%	47.9	26.296	0.05
7. I would rather study a difficult course than an easier one	51.60%	48.40%	47.6	30.144	0.05
8. It is fun answering a question that is difficult or challenging	64.50%	35.50%	48.4	31.41	0.05
9. If I cannot succeed at a new yask, I give up quickly	29%	71%	49.3	37.652	0.05
10.When I make a mistake, I just keep on trying	80.60%	19.40%	51.2	38.885	0.05
11.I don't like to set goals for myself, because I cannot reach them	35.50%	64.50%	48.8	40.113	0.05
12.If a task is too difficult, I try to get by without doing it	38.70%	61.30%	48.1	41.337	0.05
13.I generally learn from my mistakes that I make in class	74.20%	25.80%	49.9	44.172	0.05
14.If I get a low score, I make up my mind to study harder	67.70%	32.30%	48.8	48.316	0.05
15.I don't like to set goals, I just do the work and forget about it	45.20%	54.80%	47.7	47.985	0.05

* (A) = Chi-Square Values
* (B) = Critical Values of Chi-Square
* (C) = alpha level

Based on the responses given, students are fairly well motivated in terms of their willingness to learn. Students are concerned about their success and possible failures as well as viewing education as an important aspect in their life.

Students' responses to Perception of Teachers as Care Givers were calculated as percentages. The percentages indicate how many students view their teachers as caring or unsympathetic Table 2).

Table 2 Students' Perception of Teachers as Caregivers

Examples	% of Responses given	
	Group A	Group B
1. Makes a special effort, teaches in a special way, makes class interesting.	90	83
2. Talks to you, pays attention, asks questions, listens.	95	43
3. Trusts myou, tells you the truth.	88	78
4. Asks what's wrong, talks to me about my problems, acts like someone who really cares.	89	32
5. Asks if I need help, takes time to make sure that I understand, calls on me.	93	56
6. Checks work, tells me what I did wrong, tells me when I did a good job, praises me.	98	22
7. Nice to me, helps me	98	56

As a result of separating the students into two groups (Group A receiving support and nurturance, and Group B who received no care giving), it is easily noticed that students in Group A who received caring and nurturance rated the teacher more positively than compared to Group B, who received no nurturance and rated the teacher

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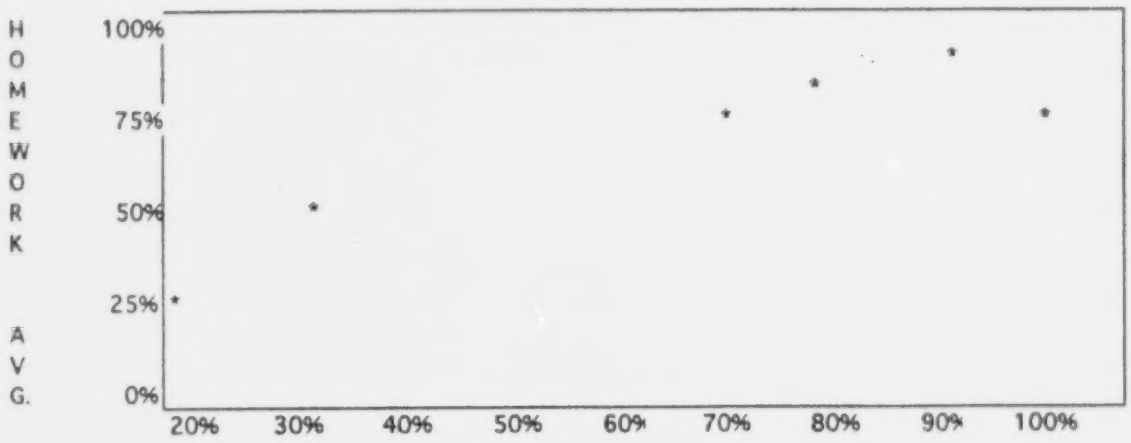
more negatively. Sponsoring an environment of care and support, plays an integral and vital role in terms of student motivation.

In order to determine the effects of homework on academic achievement, homework and test scores were calculated over a period of one month. Averages of homework were placed into five categories of completion: 1) 100%, 2) 75%, 3) 50%, 4) 25%, and 5) 0%. To establish its effects on achievement, both sets of averages (achievement in relation to homework) were graphed to plot their relation (Table 3).

Table 3 Homework in Relation to Academic Achievement



TEST SCORES

Analysis of Variance between groups (self-esteem, teacher as care givers, and homework were also calculated (Table 4).

Summary of Descriptive Statistics

Table 4

	n	Mean	SD	Range
Group 1	31	86.3	0.3	40
Group 2	31	94.2	3.3	15
Group 3	31	71.68	3.3	76.4

Group 1 = Self-Esteem Questionnaire
Group 2 = Student Responses to Teachers as Caregivers Questionnaire

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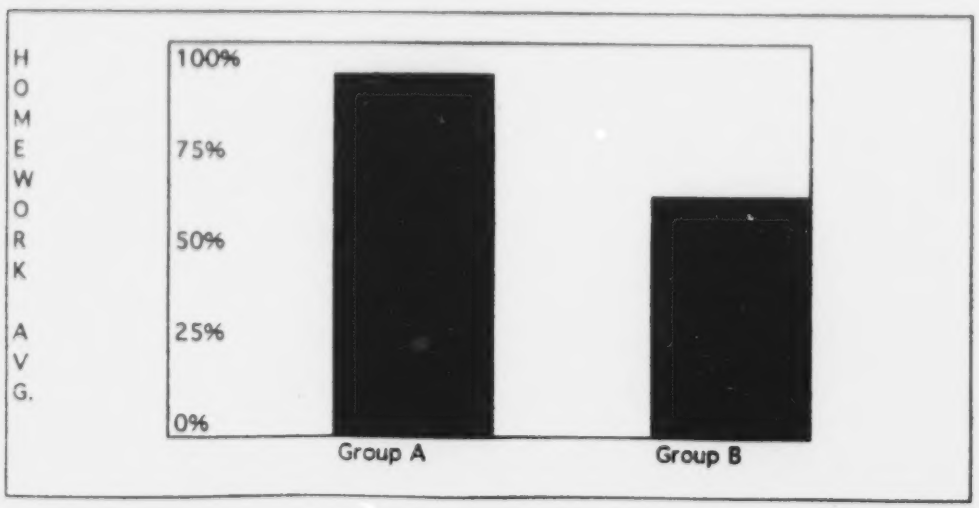
Results

The results of this study, suggests that there is a positive impact between teacher and student relation. Teachers who were described as being care givers, provided constructive feedback to students. Students perceived that by having support and confidence from their teachers, they in turn would be able to have confidence in themselves. Students who were given care and nurturance hold a sense of obligation to meet their teachers' expectations of them. Students described that when teachers make negative connotations in regards to their academics and motivation level, they feel resentment and loose belief in themselves. Without any support and sense of caring from teachers, students' motivational level decreased as indicated in Table 5.

Table 5 Caregiving and its Relation to Homework



Results also suggest that there is some relation between homework and the level of achievement. Table 3 clearly indicates that the lower the percentage of homework, the lower the test scores. However, this was not the necessarily true for students with high-test scores. Students who averaged one hundred percent in test scores, scored a lower

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percentage average in homework. This result can be explained by the students' cognitive capabilities. In this situation, there was a neutral effect between homework and achievement levels.

Limitations

Certain conditions and circumstances play important roles in motivation, which can easily modify or alter behavior. IN this study, three factors concerning motivation were examined. However, there are many other factors that could have an impact on motivation and achievement. Although equally important, each factor in this study, warranted its own investigation. The topics covered were significant in size, therefore, examined steadfastly.

There were several limitations to these findings. First of all, student motivation / self-esteem was measured with a self-report measure. Although self-reports measure student's perceptions, other measurements need to be conducted to test their reliabilities. Student observation could have been misinterpreted to assess self-esteem and motivation.

Students' perception of teachers as care givers as well need to be further examined with other forms of measurements. Possible external factors could have influenced students to down grade teachers. For example, students could have been reprimanded the day before, or could have received a low test score that same day. These and many other factors could have altered a students' perception of his or her teacher. When students responded to the Teachers as Care Givers Questionnaire, students were asked to think about teachers in general, as opposed to specific teachers in mind. Further research is needed to examine how all three components discussed: self-

esteem, teachers as care givers, and significance of curriculum / homework might intercede with students' academic achievement.

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